1969 Washington: no. 20.
1974 Hasselgren: 111, 127, 131, 195, 198, no. G 53, repro.
1975 NGA: 284, 285, no. 77, repro.
1978 Bolten and Bolten-Rempt: 202, no. 549, repro.
1984/1985 Schwartz: 339, no. 396, repro. (also 1985 English ed.).
1985 NGA: 330, repro.
1986 Sutton: 314.
1986 Tümpel: 413, no. 217, repro.
1986 Guillaud and Guillaud: 362, no. 416, repro.
1990 The Hague: no. 53.

**1942.9.60** (656)

## Rembrandt van Rijn

## *The Circumcision*

1661
Oil on canvas, 56.5 x 75 (22¼ x 29½)
Widener Collection

**Inscriptions**
At lower right: *Rembrandt. f. 1661*

**Technical Notes:** The original support, a medium-weight, loosely woven, plain-weave fabric, has been lined with the tacking margins unevenly trimmed. The absence of cusping and the presence of old, off-center, stretcher bar creases suggest the dimensions may have been substantially reduced. The double ground consists of a dark brown lower layer and a lighter brown upper layer.[1] The upper layer is translucent and has a rough texture to give it "tooth." A nearly pure black imprimatura or underpainting lies under the main figural groups and the left side of the design. The extreme solubility of this imprimatura may have contributed to the overall degree of damage.

The paint is applied in richly mixed and swirled layers, blended both wet into wet and wet over dry as glazes and scumbles. A number of cross-sections have been made to identify and locate the many complicated paint layers. The x-radiograph shows changes in the upper paint layers to enlarge the circumcisor's robe at the left, to expand the tent canopy horizontally, to alter the highlighting and positioning of the heads at the left, and to shade a once bright background area at the left.

The paint layers are quite damaged and areas of extensive repainting have been applied at various intervals. Old repaint, which was not possible to remove during the painting's restoration in the early 1990s, is found over the circumcisor's robe, the tent canopy, the heads and adjacent background of figures in the middle distance at left, Mary's headdress, and other areas of abrasion. The abraded portions include the shadows to the right of Mary and the Infant Jesus, much of the right side, the dark figures and shadows in the lower left, Mary's and the circumcisor's draperies, and the heads of the figures at center left.

**Provenance:** Probably Lodewijck van Ludick (1607–1669), Amsterdam, by 1662. Probably Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680) by 1669.[2] Probably Isaak van den Blooken, the Netherlands, by 1707; (sale, Amsterdam, 11 May 1707, no. 1). Duke of Ancaster, by 1724;[3] (sale, London, March 1724, no. 18); Andrew Hay; (sale, Cock, London, 14 February 1745, no. 47); John Spencer, 1st Earl of Spencer [1734–1783], Althorp House; inherited through family members to John Poyntz, 5th Earl of Spencer [1835–1910]; (Arthur J. Sulley & Co., London); Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, by 1912; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

**Exhibited:** *Exhibition of Paintings*, Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds, 1868, no. 735. *Rembrandt: Schilderijen Bijeengebracht ter Gelengenheid van de Inhuidiging van Hare Majesteit Koningin Wilhelmina*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1898, no. 115. *Winter Exhibition of Works by Rembrandt*, Royal Academy, London, 1899, no. 5. Washington 1969, no. 22. *Rembrandt and the Bible*, Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, 1987, no. 11.

THE ONLY MENTION of the Circumcision of Christ occurs in the Gospel of Luke, 2:15-22: "...the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem.... And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.... And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus." This cursory reference to this most significant event in the early childhood of Christ allowed artists throughout history a wide latitude in the way they represented the Circumcision.[4]

The predominant Dutch pictorial tradition was to depict the scene as though it occurred within the Temple, as, for example, in Hendrick Goltzius' influential engraving of the Circumcision of Christ, 1594 (fig. 1).[5] In the Goltzius print, the *mohel* circumcises the Christ Child, held by the high priest, as Mary and Joseph stand reverently to the side. Rembrandt largely followed this tradition in his two early etchings of the subject and in his now lost 1646 painting of the Circumcision for Prince Frederik Hendrik.[6]

The iconographic tradition of the Circumcision occurring in the Temple, which was almost certainly apocryphal, developed in the twelfth century to allow for a typological comparison between the Jewish rite of circumcision and the Christian rite of cleansing, or baptism. Integral to this tradition was the assumption that shortly after the Circumcision, Christ was presented in the Temple. A close reading of Saint Luke, however, reveals that a period of time lapsed between the two events. After Luke describes the naming of Jesus at the rite of Circumcision, he continues: "And when the [forty] days of [Mary's] purification according to the law of Moses were

Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Circumcision*, 1942.9.60

Fig. 1. Hendrick Goltzius, *Circumcision of Christ*, engraving, 1594, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen

accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord." Rembrandt's beautifully evocative painting, which places the scene before the stable, thus reflects far more accurately the circumstances of Christ's Circumcision than do representations of the event within the Temple.

Rembrandt must have reassessed the iconography of the Circumcision sometime between 1646 and 1654, the year in which he made his intimate etching *The Circumcision in the Stable* as part of a series of etchings of the life of the Christ Child (fig. 2; B. 47). Rembrandt's break from Dutch pictorial traditions may have resulted from a closer reading of the text or from discussions with Jewish scholars. It may also have been a conscious attempt to shift the theological implications of the story itself. Representations of the Circumcision in the Temple emphasized the importance of adherence to Jewish law. The circumcision was the ritual act that cleansed the sins of the parents and was the moment that a name was given to the child.[7] By depicting the scene in the humble surroundings of the stable, however, Rembrandt shifted the emphasis of the story to stress its implications for Christian beliefs.

In this painting of 1661 Rembrandt added a new component to his scene by having Mary, rather than Joseph or another male, hold the Christ Child. In this way he suggested the fundamental association between the Circumcision and Christ's final shedding of blood at his Crucifixion. Mary holds her son tenderly in her lap before the ladder of the stable, just as she will do some thirty-three years later near a ladder leaning against the cross. A canopy, placed over her head, reinforces the sacramental character of the scene and offers a further reminder of the significance of this, the first of Mary's Seven Sorrows.[8]

The Circumcision is performed by a priest, dressed in yellow ceremonial robes, who kneels before the Child in a gesture of serving and obeisance. Mary, who wears a red dress, tenderly holds the Child and gazes lovingly down at him. Visually, her body and that of the priest form a triangular shape that reinforces their shared sense of responsibility. While the bright colors of their clothing and centrally placed forms draw the viewer's attention to this sacred rite, the onlookers in the painting peer not at the Christ Child but at the scribe who writes the name of the Child in a large book he holds in his left hand. The excitement and anticipation of the onlookers who crane forward to learn the name of the young Messiah, however, places the scene within a Christian context. Joseph is almost certainly the bareheaded, bearded man who stands nearest the Virgin and Child. Among the witnesses, on the far left, appears to be Rembrandt himself.[9]

The innovative and subtle interpretation Rembrandt has given to the scene has confused observers in the past. Hofstede de Groot, for example, believed that Rembrandt initially portrayed here the Adoration of the Magi. He argued that during the course of execution Rembrandt changed one of the Magi into the priest performing the Circumcision. He also suggested that Rembrandt changed the priest's retinue into the observing crowd. Alternatively, he argued, the scribe might have originally been Zacharias and the scene initially the Circumcision of John the Baptist.[10] While Hofstede de Groot's theories did not receive widespread acceptance, a number of writers in ensuing years have used his ideas as a point of departure for assessing Rembrandt's interpretation of the Circumcision in this painting.[11]

Hofstede de Groot might have been mistaken in the types of changes he believed Rembrandt had made in this work, but x-radiographs have revealed a notable pentimento: the yellow cloak of the high priest performing the Circumcision was enlarged

and given a bolder form at some point during the course of the work (fig. 3). This change, which enhances the prominence and stateliness of the figure, is compositionally significant. It is of even greater interest, however, historically; for it confirms that this painting is one of two works, the other a *Nativity*, acquired from Rembrandt for 600 guilders by the Amsterdam collector and art dealer Lodewijk van Ludick. In a document dated 28 August 1662, Van Ludick stated that he was returning *The Circumcision* to Rembrandt to have him "repaint the circumciser."[12] Since Van Ludick referred to his painting as being on a small panel (*bortie*), some have questioned whether the National Gallery's *Circumcision*, which is on canvas, was the painting in his possession.[13] The discovery of the alterations to the robes of the circumciser, however, should dispel all doubts. The small scale of this work, which is comparable to that of a panel painting, may well have created the confusion in his mind.

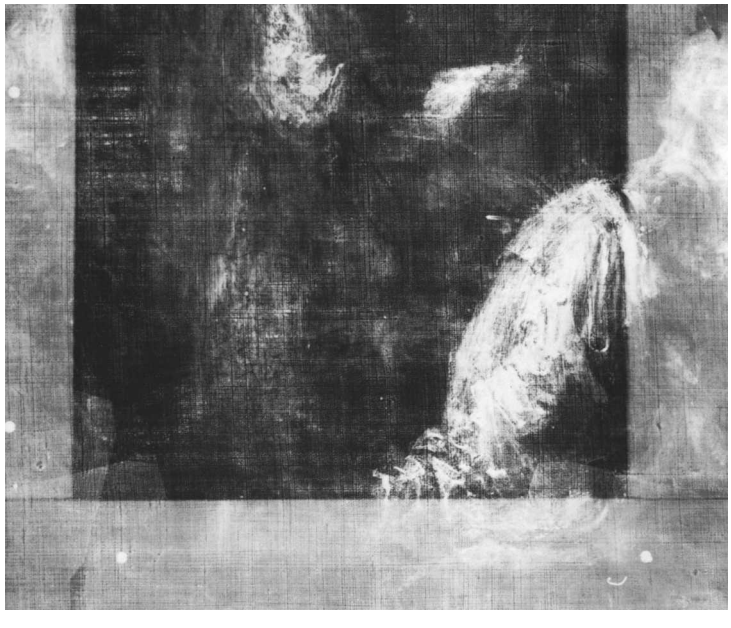
This document also raises the question as to whether the *Nativity* and *The Circumcision* Rembrandt painted for Van Ludick were pendants. One price is listed for both works. One could imagine that the quiet, reverential mood of the scene in *The Circumcision* might have been consciously conceived to complement a depiction of this thematically related episode from Christ's life.[14] Nevertheless, technical evidence indicating that Rembrandt reduced the size of *The Circumcision* on all four sides, makes it unlikely that he initially composed this work as a pendant to another composition.[15] It is not certain how much the canvas was reduced, but the absence of distortions in the weave of the canvas on all sides suggests it was a substantial amount.[16]

The broadly expressive, painterly character of this intimate scene has long been admired,[17] but in recent years questions have been raised as to whether the work was actually executed by Rembrandt. Both Schwartz and Tümpel have doubted the attribution, with Schwartz proposing that Rembrandt's assistant at that time, Aert de Gelder (1645–1727), may have painted the scene.[18] The splotchy character of the paint on many of the figures' faces, particularly that of the scribe, the poor articulation of hands, and the general lack of firm structure evident in many areas of the painting are, indeed, reminiscent of Aert de Gelder's later manner of painting. Associations between *The Circumcision* and Aert de Gelder are not new. In 1883 Bode noted that "in the cursory treatment, in the bright colors (the bright robe of the priest in front of Mary) and in the carelessness of expression the painting very much recalls Rembrandt's student at that time Aert de Gelder."[19]

Fig. 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, 1654, *The Circumcision in the Stable*, etching, Washington, National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection

De Gelder, who is well known as the only Rembrandt pupil to continue in the master's style into the early eighteenth century, was born in Dordrecht in 1645. Houbraken relates that after having been grounded in the fundamentals of art by Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–1678), De Gelder studied with Rembrandt in Amsterdam for two years.[20] The exact dates that he was with Rembrandt are not known, but because of stylistic and thematic connections with Rembrandt's works during the early 1660s, it seems probable that he was in the workshop between 1661 and 1663.[21] It is, in any event, highly unlikely that this recently arrived sixteen-year-old student would have been entrusted with the execution of a painting for a patron who knew Rembrandt's work so well.[22]

Fig. 3. X-radiograph of high priest in 1942.9.60



Judging this work on the basis of the manner of execution, however, is extremely difficult because of the painting's poor state of preservation.[23] Indeed, much of the apparently free handling of paint is a direct result of the severe abrasion and pronounced cracquelure that covers the surface. The area surrounding the Virgin, for example, is quite worn, perhaps because a strong solvent was at one time used to clean this area. Large portions of the background, particularly on the right, are extremely thin and almost impossible to read properly. Complicating a critical evaluation of the quality of execution are the old overpaints that have muddied certain forms, such as the Virgin's canopy, and have made a spatial reading even more difficult.

The recent restoration, while greatly improving the appearance of the painting, has revealed that the paint has been severely flattened when too much heat and pressure were applied during a relining.[24] In certain areas, as for example in the head of the scribe and the figures near him, it also appears that the heat has softened the black underlying layer causing it to ooze out around the overlying flesh tones. Even with careful technical analysis, it has proven impossible to determine just what the original appearance of the paint surface was.

Because of the poor condition of the painting, judgments of attribution cannot be based primarily on questions of technique. Nevertheless, in certain areas, particularly in the modeling of the priest's robes, the surety of Rembrandt's touch is evident. Comparison of technique can also be made between the figures of witnesses to the event, particularly the young woman at the upper left, and the small-scale figures in Rembrandt's *Anna and Tobit*, 1659 (fig. 4). Iconographic, compositional, and documentary evidence, moreover, all point strongly to Rembrandt's authorship. The unusual and evocative iconography was clearly conceived by someone conversant with both Jewish and Christian traditions. Compositionally, the juxtaposition of the quiet group performing the rite of circumcision and the expressive energy of the crowd peering at the book is persuasively conceived in a manner that enriches the meaning of the story. Finally, the fact that a substantial amount of money was paid for this painting by a dealer who knew Rembrandt's work well, and who was in the midst of complex financial arrangements with him, makes it virtually certain that *The Circumcision* was executed by the master and not by a member of his workshop.

Fig. 4. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Anna and Tobit*, oil on panel, 1661, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen

**Notes**

1. Pigment and medium analyses of paint and ground layers are available in the Scientific Research department.

2. Blankert 1982b; no. 14 in inventory of 8 October 1669.

3. See Simpson 1953, 41.

4. I am greatly indebted to Judith K. Lyon for the extensive research she undertook on this painting, which has provided the foundations for this entry.

5. Goltzius' composition derives from Albrecht Dürer's woodcut *The Circumcision*, 1504 (B. 86), which was part of his series devoted to the *Life of the Virgin*.

6. While the arrangements of the protagonist vary in all three representations, they share a common tradition in that the Christ Child is held by a male figure rather than by Mary. In his 1626 etching (Münz 1952, 2: no. 187, pl. 208) Rembrandt depicted the high priest performing the operation; in his etching of c. 1630 (B. 48) he represented the priest as standing behind the altar; and in his 1646 painting, as can be judged in a workshop replica in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig (inv. no. 241), the priest holds the Christ Child.

7. Aurenhammer 1959, 356, indicates that this textually incorrect interpretation of the Circumcision in the Temple was forbidden during the Counter-Reformation.

8. Judith K. Lyon has stressed in her research that a medieval tradition exists in which Mary is shown holding the Christ Child while the priest or *mohel*, either bending or kneeling, performs the rite. Two primary examples are found in the *Nicholas of Verdun* altarpiece, Klosterneuberg Monastery (completed 1181), and in an illumination by the Master of the Berthold Sacramentary, from the Benedictine Abbey of Weingarten. A fifteenth-century example of this tradition is in a Book of Hours by the Master of Mary of Burgundy (see Alexander 1970, no. 78). Whether Rembrandt knew of this tradition is not certain, but highly probable.

9. In this respect Rembrandt follows Goltzius, who also depicted himself in the background, in his 1594 engraving of the same subject (see fig. 1).

10. See Hofstede de Groot 1899b, 159–166, no. 115; HdG 1907–1927, 6: 68, no. 82.

11. Douglas Lewis in Washington 1969, 32, no. 22, emphasizes Rembrandt's departure from artistic convention by placing the scene in the stable at Bethlehem. He notes as well that Rembrandt's 1654 etching of the same subject (fig. 2) also represents the scene as having taken place in the stable.

Finally, he suggests that Rembrandt may have been inspired to give such prominence to the scribe through the description of the Circumcision of John the Baptist in Luke, 1:59–63. Tümpel 1981, 431–433, gives the best critique of Hofstede de Groot's assessment and correctly argues that Rembrandt had always intended to depict the Circumcision of Christ in this work. Not only does he point out the close reading of the biblical text evident in Rembrandt's painting, he also traces the evolution of the imagery and iconography of Christ's Circumcision.

12. Strauss and Van der Meulen 1979, doc. 1662/6, 499–502. The circumstances concerning Rembrandt and Van Ludick's financial arrangements are quite complicated. *The Circumcision*, along with a *Nativity*, were acquired by Van Ludick as part of an arrangement to satisfy debts Rembrandt had incurred with the art dealer-collector. The translation of the relevant passage is as follows: "Furthermore, they also settled and canceled the completion and delivery of two [other] paintings, a 'Nativity' and a 'Circumcision' which van Rhijn had sold to van Ludick for 600 guilders in exchange for prints and small pictures, which were delivered to van Rhijn personally after he had purchased them at van Ludick's [Dutch] auction. However, with the proviso that van Rhijn is to receive 118 guilders; this being the difference between 600 guilders and the sum of his purchase, but van Rhijn shall be obliged to repaint the circumciser in the aforementioned panel and improve it as is proper."

13. HdG 1907–1927, 6: 68, no. 82, for example, did not believe that this painting was the "Circumcision" listed in this document because it was allegedly on panel.

14. There is strong evidence that the two episodes from the life of Christ were connected in Rembrandt's mind. In 1646 Rembrandt delivered to Prince Frederik Hendrik an *Adoration of the Shepherds* and a *Circumcision* as part of his Passion series. In 1654 he included both scenes in a loose cycle of six etchings illustrating scenes from the childhood of Christ (B. 45; B. 47).

15. It could well be that the *Nativity* was painted as a pendant to this work in its reduced format.

16. Craquelure conforming to what must have been a vertically placed stretcher bar can be found to the right of the center. This information suggests that the canvas may have been cut at the right more than at the left.

17. Smith 1829–1842, 7: 28, no. 69, called it "an admirably finished study, remarkably brilliant and effective"; Waagen 1838b, 3: 336, considered it "Very spirited, and of striking effect"; Bode 1897–1906, 7: 13, mentioned its "sketchy handling"; Gerson/Bredius 1969, 611, no. 596, wrote that "Rembrandt's picture is a superb example of his late style, when he was turning away from a too emphatic and powerful construction of form to a looser, more sensuous, even picturesque rendering of the subject."

18. Schwartz 1984/1985, 324, no. 376; Tümpel 1986, 420, A12, removes this work from Rembrandt's oeuvre, and lists it as "Atelier de Rembrandt."

19. Bode 1883, 525: "in der weichen, flüchtigen Behandlung, in der hellen Färbung (der Priester vor der Maria trägt ein hellgelbes Kleid) und der Vernachlässigung im Ausdruck errinnert das Bild sehr an Rembrandt's damaligen Schüler A. de Gelder." Bode, however, never questioned the attribution to Rembrandt. It is interesting to note that when Aert de Gelder turned to the theme of Christ's Circumcision (*Circumcision of Christ*, c. 1700–1710, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), he followed the tradition found in the composition Rembrandt painted for Frederik Hendrik (see note 13). Therefore, it is unlikely that De Gelder had anything to do with the execution of the National Gallery painting.

20. Houbraken 1753, 3, 206–207. Houbraken mistakenly wrote that De Gelder came to Rembrandt in 1645 (the year of his birth), so it is impossible to pinpoint his date of arrival in Amsterdam.

21. One particularly telling bit of evidence that De Gelder was in Amsterdam in 1663 is that he made a free adaptation of Rembrandt's *Homer*, 1663 (Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. no. 584), many years later (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 39.45). Since Rembrandt's painting was sent to Messina after its completion, De Gelder would not have had a chance to see it at a later date. It is unlikely that De Gelder based his painting on Rembrandt's preliminary drawing for *Homer* (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, inv. no. 1677/1875; Ben. 1066), as Rembrandt had presumably sent the drawing to his patron in Messina, Antonio Ruffo, for approval. For a discussion of the drawing's early history in Italy, see Börje Magnusson's catalogue entry in Stockholm 1992, 361, no. 160.

22. Josua Bruyn, "Rembrandt's workshop: its function and production," in Berlin 1991, 85, notes that De Gelder's hand has not been identified with any painting from Rembrandt's workshop during the early 1660s, with the possible exception of one portrait of Rembrandt.

23. The poor state of preservation was already remarked upon by Hofstede de Groot 1899b, 163.

24. I am greatly indebted to Sarah Fisher from the National Gallery's conservation department, Michael Palmer and Melanie Gifford from the Scientific Research department, and Karen Groen from the RRP for their helpful observations about the complex paint layers in this work.

## References


1829–1842 Smith, 7 (1836): xxiii, 28, no. 69.
1838b Waagen, 3: 336.
1854–1857 Waagen, 3 (1854): 459.
1868 Vosmaer: 311, 496 (also 1877 ed.: 361, 562).
1879 Mollett: 73.
1883 Dutuit: 48, no. 53.
1883 Bode: 525, 578, no. 137.
1884 De Roever: 81–105.
1893 Michel: 462–463, 555 (also 1894 English ed., 2: 237).
1897–1906 Bode, 7 (1902): 13, 98–99, no. 518, repro.
1899b Hofstede de Groot: 159–166.
1899 Bell: 85 (also 1907 rev. ed.: 81, 123).
1906 Hofstede de Groot: 298, no. 253.
1906 Rosenberg: 366 repro., 405 (also 1908 ed.: 465, repro., 564; and 1909 ed.: 465, repro.).
1907 Brown: 211.
1907–1927 HdG, 6 (1916): 68, no. 82.
1913–1916 Widener, 1 (1913): intro., no. 38, repro.
1914 Valentiner: 249, no. 87.
1921b Valentiner: 465, repro.
1923 Widener: unpaginated, repro.
1923 Meldrum: 202, pl. 415.
1923 Van Dyck: 144.
1930b Valentiner: 3–84, repro.
1931 Widener: 58–59, repro.
1931 Valentiner: no. 150, repro.
1935 Bredius: 26, 596, repro. (also 1936 English ed., 26, 596, repro.).
1938 Waldmann: 334–343.
1942 Mather: 195–203, repro.

1942 Widener: 6, no. 656.
1948 Widener: 47, no. 656, repro.
1953 Simpson: 39–42.
1954 Münz: 146–147, repro. (also 1984 rev. ed.: 112–113, repro.).
1965 NGA: 110, no. 656.
1966 Bauch: 6–7, 44, no. 93, repro.
1966 Schiller 1: 100 (also 1970 English ed., 1: 90).
1968 Gerson: 132, 134, 154, 410, 416, repro., 501–502, no. 350.
1968 NGA: 99, repro.
1969 Gerson/Bredius: 500, repro., 611, no. 596.
1969 Washington: no. 22.
1975 NGA: 286, repro.
1976 Walker: 282, repro.
1976 Garlick: 117–124.
1978 Esteban and Monneret: 112–113, color repro.
1979 Strauss and Van der Meulen: 480, 499–500.
1979 Keller: 77–112, color repro.
1980 Hoekstra: 27, color repro.
1981 Tümpel: 429–434.
1984/1985 Schwartz: 324, 330, no. 376, color repro. (also 1985 English ed.).
1985 NGA: 331, repro.
1986 Tümpel: 355, 420, no. A12, color repro.
1986 Guillaud and Guillaud: 554–555, color repro.
1986 Sutton: 312.
1987 Fukuoka: no. 11, color repro.
1988 Pears: 83, repro.

**1942.9.69** (665)

## Rembrandt van Rijn

## *Portrait of a Man in a Tall Hat*

c. 1663
Oil on canvas, 121.3 x 94 (47¾ x 37)
Widener Collection

**Technical Notes:** The support is a medium-weight, herringbone-weave fabric consisting of two pieces seamed horizontally at center, 65 cm from the top. The seam protrudes slightly. The support has been double lined using a gauze interleaf visible in x-radiographs, with the tacking margins trimmed. Absence of cusping on all sides suggests reduction of the original dimensions. A pale, smooth ground layer was applied, followed by a thin, black imprimatura overall. A reddish brown underpainting occurs in selected areas such as the face.

Paint was applied as thick pastes with complex layering and lively brushmarking in the features. Brushes and a palette knife were used to apply paint, and lines were incised with the butt end of a brush. The figure was painted after the background. The red paint of the table continues underneath the black cloak. Artist's changes visible in the x-radiograph include the proper left arm, which originally bent sharply at the elbow with the proper left hand holding a glove, appearing at center (see fig. 2). The proper right arm originally extended downward, ending in a hand that grasped some draped object. White cuffs were eliminated from both sleeves, the left collar tassel was moved to the right, the collar shortened, and the hat slimmed.

Numerous small losses occur in the white collar and scattered minor losses overall. The face is intact save minute flake losses. Severe abrasion in the background and costume has been retouched. Lining has flattened the paint texture overall. A thick, discolored varnish layer obscures the surface. No conservation has been carried out since acquisition by the National Gallery.

**Provenance:** Ivor Bertie Guest [1st Baron Wimborne, later Lord Wimborne, 1835–1914], Canford Manor, Dorsetshire, by 1883; possibly by inheritance to Ivor Churchill Guest [2nd Baron, 1873–1939], Wimborne, Dorsetshire. (Arthur J. Sulley & Co., London); Peter A. B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania by 1912; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park.

**Exhibited:** Washington 1969, no. 21.

THE IDENTITY of this imposing sitter has long been lost, but his dress and demeanor indicate that he was a well-to-do burgher, probably an Amsterdam merchant. The date of the portrait is also unknown, but similarities between this work and Rembrandt's *Syndics of the Cloth Drapers' Guild* of 1662 (fig. 1) suggest that the two paintings are not far removed in date. The sitter's hairstyle and costume, particularly his wide, flat collar with its tassels, are similar, as is the dignity and gravity that he projects as he focuses his eyes on the viewer from beneath his wide-brimmed black hat. Even the herringbone canvases that Rembrandt used for these paintings are comparable.[1]

The vigor and surety of Rembrandt's brushwork is particularly evident in the head. He has modeled the man's face with broad strokes heavily loaded with a relatively dry paint. Since it is mixed with little medium, the paint has a broken character that enhances the sitter's rough-hewn features. Stylistically, this manner of execution is broader than that found in the National Gallery's *A Young Man Seated at a Table*, 1660 (1937.1.77), with which it is often compared,[2] and, to a certain extent, even broader than that of the *Syndics of the Cloth Drapers' Guild*, an evolution of style that suggests a date of execution subsequent to these works, perhaps 1663.

Unfortunately, aside from the well-preserved face and the relative disposition of the figure, it is extremely difficult to make precise assessments about this painting. The basic problem is that the original character of the painting has been distorted through flattening, abrasion, and discolored varnish.[3] Infrared examination reveals that extensive abrasion in the reddish brown background has been heavily restored. The degree to which the massive